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TAGS: KS KN PGOV PREL
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR NSA BAEK'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON

Classified By: Ambassador Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: ROK National Security Advisor Baek Jong-chun will make what he sees as his final visit to Washington in his current position on December 3-4. In a November 28 meeting with the Ambassador, he said that the main reason for the trip was to coordinate on relevant U.S.-ROK issues for the remainder of President Roh Moo-hyun's term, mentioning the ROKG's Iraq presence as an example, and that North Korea issues were not the priority. However, he may also make a last-ditch argument for an early four-leaders' meeting to declare the end of the Korean War, despite the Ambassador's clear assurances that this is not in the cards. The visit provides an opportunity to put that idea to rest, to thank Baek for the Roh administration's support in Iraq and Afghanistan and urge its continuance, and to underline the importance of the ROK opening its beef market to allow Congress to consider the KORUS-FTA early in ¶2008. END SUMMARY.

KEY ISSUES FOR WASHINGTON VISIT

¶2. (C) Regarding his planned trip to Washington on December 3-4, Baek said that his aim was to coordinate on relevant U.S.-ROK issues for the remainder of Roh's term, mentioning extension of the ROKG's troop dispatch as an example, and that North Korea issues were not the priority. Thus, the December 3-4 visit provides an opportunity to seek the Roh administration's close cooperation on issues of mutual interest during Roh's final three months in office.

¶3. (C) SIX-PARTY TALKS: ROKG leadership of the Economy and Energy Cooperation Working Group is professional, with sustained attention to communicating with other countries, so an expression of gratitude is appropriate. The ROKG shares our concerns about securing a complete DPRK declaration of its nuclear programs, including the uranium issue, and about the importance of getting on with dismantlement. Baek should be assured that the Bush Administration will uphold its end of the Six Party-related commitments -- including delisting the DPRK from the terrorism list and launching the peace treaty negotiations -- as soon as the DPRK fulfills all of its phase-two commitments.

¶4. (C) INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS: Since the October 2-4 South-North summit, inter-Korean relations have accelerated into overdrive, featuring Prime Minister and Defense Minister talks, a visit to Seoul from the DPRK's intel chief and Kim Jong-il confidant Kim Yang-on, detailed economic agreements

and unprecedented site surveys by ROKG officials in the DPRK, and rumors of further senior meetings before Roh leaves

office. While the hyperactivity is politically driven (to burnish Roh's legacy and lock in the next administration), the ROKs have thus far been careful not to cross any of our red lines or to undercut the Six-Party process. We should welcome the considerable progress in North-South cooperation and remind Baek of the value of the ROKG using its DPRK meetings to reiterate the importance of full denuclearization, as has been the case recently. We should also stress the need for continued transparency and consultation as inter-Korean talks proceed, with the Six-Party talks at a delicate state.

15. (C) BEEF: While Baek's focus will be on security issues, it will be important for him to hear Washington's views on two trade issues that are critical for our overall relationship. The first is beef, resolution of which is indispensable to building Congressional support for FTA ratification. The ROKG has begun signaling that it can probably agree to our desired end-goal (allowing in beef of "all products, all ages," as permitted under the World Animal Health Organization (OIE) international guidelines), but it's not clear that Korea is prepared to get there in the timeframe we need, and is instead proposing an interim phase that may be problematic in terms of product coverage or duration. Baek will presumably reiterate the ROKG position that the U.S. should be satisfied with an interim solution that approves 90 percent of our previous exports (a figure that our experts contest). The broader point is: U.S. beef exporters have been patiently waiting for this market to reopen for four years; Korea told us during FTA negotiations: "wait until international science endorses your beef's safety (as it now has), and that will give us necessary political cover"; and President Roh told both President Bush and the Korean people that Korea would respect the OIE guidelines. So now it's critical that Korea be seen as agreeing to an OIE-consistent outcome. Baek may cite Korea's own "scientific" findings to justify banning U.S. beef of certain cuts or ages; but that is not OIE consistent. If Korea is going to let its policy on beef be dictated by the Agriculture Ministry (and its desire to placate Korean beef farmers and NGOs), or try to hide behind Japanese inaction, then we won't be able to get the KORUS FTA ratified. Senators Baucus and Grassley have made that clear.

16. (C) FTA: Our other trade priority -- prompt Korean ratification of the FTA -- shouldn't be as hard a sell with Baek. We would like to see Korea's National Assembly ratify the FTA promptly to help build momentum for Congressional ratification. Similarly, the Roh Government would like to see the National Assembly ratify the FTA before President Roh leaves office on February 25, as part of his legacy. Some National Assembly members have been dragging their feet, particularly before the December 19 Presidential election, but the Blue House is making a full-court press and appears to be optimistic that it can get a positive vote in the lame-duck legislative session after the election (particularly with Korean public support for the FTA still in the 60-70 percent range). If Korean ratification slips past the inauguration of the new President, the transition and other political events here could push ratification to the summer or beyond -- which would give U.S. opponents an argument to defer Congressional action till 2009. It will be useful for Baek to hear that, despite some noisy opposition, the Administration is strongly committed to KORUS, has the strong support of the U.S. business community, and hopes to be in a position to move KORUS forward for Congressional ratification in the first half of 2008 -- but that will be significantly harder, if not impossible, without prompt Korean ratification.

17. (C) EXTENSION OF ROK'S ZAYTUN UNIT IN IRAQ: The National Assembly opted not to vote on the motion to extend the Zaytun unit mission in Iraq prior to the end of its regular session on November 23. Ruling UNDP party leaders sought to avoid publicly highlighting the "discrepancy" that would have been

apparent if the bill were approved while the party's candidate for president, Chung Dong-young, was on record as opposed to it. The bill remains within the Defense Committee for the time being, where our vote count indicates a total of 10 GNP and Democratic Party members in support of the extension, while 8 UNDP members stand opposed. Composition of the plenary body, however, indicates 142 votes in favor and 150 opposed, with the 7 swing votes up for grabs. An extraordinary session will be held sometime in December, but the start date has not yet been set. We should stress the importance of the ROK's continued presence and support in Iraq as well as the merits to a positive decision on Zaytun by the end of this year.

¶18. (C) AFGHANISTAN AND BEYOND: We should tell Baek that we are pleased to hear that the ROK plans to continue operating its medical clinic in Bagram in 2008. Baek should be encouraged to have the ROK give additional consideration to lead a PRT in Afghanistan, as well as providing the financial assistance needed to support the Uzbek powerline project. Donations of ROK military equipment to the Afghan Army would also be helpful.

¶19. (C) VISA WAIVER PROGRAM: Korean citizens and government officials are eager to obtain Visa Waiver Program (VWP) privileges for the ROK, but work remains to be done by both the ROK and the U.S. New VWP security requirements put in place earlier this year -- including solid airport security practices; tighter aircraft security; sharing information on criminal activity and terrorism; and exchanging information on lost and stolen passports -- are mostly acceptable to ROK officials. While Korean privacy laws do not permit government release of criminal records to third parties, the ROK side is committed to finding a way to help the USG get criminal record data without itself being a conduit. Joining the VWP also requires an e-passport and officials are determined Korean citizens will have such a document by mid-2008. On the U.S. side, DHS reports that development of its Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA), to permit name checks of VWP travelers prior to embarking for the U.S. under the new VWP, is not yet funded. Once funded, ETA can reportedly be put in place in about 12 months. Thus it would be reasonable to tell Baek that, if all goes well, the ROK might be eligible to become a full VWP partner the first half of 2009.

END OF WAR DECLARATION

¶10. (C) During their November 28 meeting the Ambassador emphasized to Baek the need for continued close ROK-U.S. coordination, including on North Korean issues, and reiterated that there was no chance that POTUS would agree to meet Kim Jong-il while the DPRK still possessed nuclear weapons.

¶11. (C) Baek appeared resigned that President Roh would not be able to achieve such a meeting, but he nevertheless repeated the Blue House arguments for an early declaration to end the Korean War. Baek said that the phrase "declaring the end to the Korean War" as used in the October 4 South-North Summit Declaration did not mean that such a declaration would be part of a formal peace agreement. Instead, the idea would be to bring together the leaders of the four countries to show a "political commitment" to establishing normal relations with each other and resolving the nuclear issue. If the DPRK were to start dismantlement, Baek said, that would be a significant step, and for leaders to then declare the end of the Korean War would be an appropriate response. On the other hand, waiting to declare the end of the War until a formal peace agreement was in place would take a long time. He cited the 1978 Camp David accords as an example of leaders coming together to promote peace before an agreement was in place. Baek said he agreed with the Ambassador's point that a POTUS-Kim Jong-il meeting could be seen as legitimizing the DPRK's possession of nuclear weapons, but the problem was that the DPRK insisted that it would not give

up its nuclear weapons until the U.S. gives up its "hostile policy." Declaring an end of the war, he argued, would be a symbolic way of doing so. Baek closed the subject by saying that perhaps the next ROK government could find common ground with the U.S. on this.

ROK-U.S. RELATIONS

¶12. (C) Baek is likely to seek an expression of gratitude from the U.S. for what he and President Roh regard as extraordinary efforts to sustain and improve ROK-U.S. relations. Given the scratchiness of our dialogue with Roh over the past 4-5 years and his recurrent anti-American rhetoric, this might appear to be a stretch. But over the last year, we have managed to resolve key problems in the defense alliance, including OPCON transfer, conclude the KORUS FTA, and stay on the same page on North Korea. It would be reasonable to thank Baek for those efforts, while at the same time sending the message that the degree of trust and consultation has been less than what two close allies should aspire to. Nevertheless, President Roh will hand over a healthy U.S.-ROK alliance to his successor on February 25 -- we're all counting the days.

VERSHBOW